

GRANT'S TRIBUTE
TO
LINCOLN

GRANT'S TRIBUTE
TO
LINCOLN

*One hundred copies privately printed
for Lincoln Collectors
of which this is*

No. _____

COMPILED AND EDITED BY
CHARLES T. WHITE
BROOKLYN, N. Y.



A man of great ability, pure patriotism, unselfish nature, full of forgiveness to his enemies, bearing malice toward none he proved to be the man above all others for the great struggle through which the Nation had to pass to place itself among the greatest in the family of Nations; His fame will grow brighter as time passes and his great work is better understood.

W. A. Brown

GRANT'S AUTOGRAPH TRIBUTE TO LINCOLN

A Historical Document

General U. S. Grant's beautiful tribute to his great Commander-in-Chief came to light through the instrumentality of Emanuel Hertz, L.L.D., author of "Abraham Lincoln: A New Portrait," published by Horace Liveright in 1931. Dr. Hertz discovered it while searching for unpublished Lincoln data. Dr. Hertz could have found a place for it in his Lincoln volumes, but somewhat reluctantly withheld it, because it was essentially a GRANT rather than a LINCOLN document, although it would qualify in either classification. It apparently was written in Osborn H. Oldroyd's Lincoln Museum (the old Peterson house opposite Ford's Theatre where Lincoln died).

Mr. Oldroyd had an informal way of suggesting to distinguished callers that an autograph tribute to Lincoln would be a prized addition to his collection. Mr. Oldroyd used a letterhead with a profile of Lincoln, and the presumption is that he induced General Grant while casually calling and looking over the Lincoln relics in the museum to write his tribute.

The simple story by Henry E. Wing, forming the major portion of this pamphlet, is one of the most revealing things in Civil War annals. Wing was Senate reporter for the New York Tribune and war correspondent with the Army of the Potomac, later an enlisted soldier and the principal in a heroic episode following the first day's battle of the Wilderness in May, 1864, when at great personal risk he carried a personal message from Grant to Lincoln. He wrote considerably about Lincoln, his "When Lincoln Kissed Me" being regarded as a Civil War classic.

Mr. Wing's narrative printed herewith gives an inside view of the relations between the President and the Commander of the Army of the Potomac. As such it is a valuable contribution. Mr. Wing for the greater portion of his life following the war was a Methodist minister, part of the time in Iowa. His later activities were in the New York East Conference of the Methodist Church, in which he held various charges. The story given here appeared in the New York Christian Advocate on February 6, 1913, under the general title, "Stories of a War Correspondent."

—C.T.W.

THE WING NARRATIVE:

I had promised Mr. Lincoln that I would not fail to call upon him whenever I came in from the front. I soon discovered that he had an ulterior motive in seeking these interviews; at least he made them the occasion for getting information that would come to him from no other source. We correspondents of Northern newspapers had insight into circumstances that escaped the view of others. That was what we were there for, to watch the drift of things; to

study the deep current of sentiment moving the mass of citizen soldiery, in whose courage and endurance the fate of the Nation was anchored. We were not the servants or agents of the government, though we frequently rendered it valuable service, but we were emissaries of the great loyal public, sent to observe their sons and brothers in the ranks, working out their country's destiny. We were never to forget that our constituency was a patient and patriotic Nation, watching with anxious, intelligent interest the movements and fortunes of those whose names were on their lips and in their hearts as they sat about their hearthstones and bowed at the family altars. Thus, though our association was mostly with the general officers, many of our intimacies were with the rank and file. We, more certainly than any others, had our fingers constantly upon the pulse of the army, and were kept acquainted with its varying moods and temper.

WHAT LINCOLN LEARNED ABOUT GRANT

It was just after the shocking misadventure of Cold Harbor (June 3, 1864) that I sat with the President one night in his private room. I soon discovered that he was leading me to talk, very freely, of my personal acquaintance with Lieutenant General Grant, and I opened my mind, without reserve, and substantially as follows:

General Grant's fame as a successful leader had preceded him East and with it had floated many statements derogatory of his private character. Among other faults, was the use sometimes in excess, of spiritous liquors; indeed a popular current "Lincoln story" was, in effect, that someone reported to the President that Grant was "drunk"

on the occasion of one of his brilliant victories, to which Mr. Lincoln made reply that he would be pleased to learn the brand of that whiskey, to prescribe it to some of his other commanders. (Mr. Lincoln made prompt and emphatic denial of this "incident," yet the fabrication is still circulated, by the liquor interests, as an indorsement by the great President of the drink habit).

These representations had led me to expect to meet a man of a dominating personality, of rough manners and questionable morals. Instead, to my surprise, I was greeted by a mild-mannered, matter-of-fact, sedate gentleman in uniform, who, upon acquaintance, proved to be clean in speech, scrupulous in his observance of the proprieties of life, and, most astonishing of all, a total abstainer from intoxicants.

A night ride and lonely bivouac in the forest with one of his staff afforded an opportunity to seek light on the question: Was there ever any ground for those damaging reports? I learned that the general early in his career as commander was addicted to the moderate use of alcoholic spirits. In one of the great battles in which he won a decisive victory, he was more than ordinarily under the influence of stimulants. That was the end. Realizing, evidently, how nearly he had ventured to the verge of incapacity and disaster, with no avowal of his purpose, he quit. And since that day, without a word of explanation to even his most intimate associates, he had followed his present absetemious course of life. (This is not the story in which some person is exploited as being the "humble instrument" in the reformation of General Grant; but it was related to me by one of his most intimate associates

and is perfectly consistent with the character of the introspective, reticent man whom I knew in 1864).

GRANT'S CHIVALROUS LOYALTY

I had taken for granted that Mr. Lincoln had heard these damaging reports and that he would be pleased to have them corrected, and he had encouraged me, thus far, by an occasional nod or smile of assent, but it was when I broached the subject of the loyalty of the chief commander toward his immediate subordinates in rank, that my auditor was roused to an attitude of intense interest. (As I write this now, after an interval of nearly fifty years, I can see him sitting opposite me, squarely fronting the flat table, with his long body bent forward in one of his familiar attitudes of attention, his arms stretched out in a great circle, and his rough, bony fingers, gripped together under his rugged face).

The General gave us an example of this chivalrous regard for the honor and fair fame of his comrades-in-arms at the very beginning of the great Wilderness campaign. After the first day's unpromising struggle in the Wilderness, at a gathering of the chief captains, General Meade and some others favored a retreat across the Rapidan, under cover of the night, and a renewal of the movement by some more feasible route. To this suggestion the Lieutenant General interposed a positive veto. While the meeting was strictly private, every newspaper man at headquarters became possessed of the facts; but this was before the days of "yellow journalism," and none of us felt at liberty to spread before the public what had transpired at a secret council of the men into whose hands had been committed

such grave interests. None of us made mention of the affair in our reports—with a single exception. The correspondent of one quite influential paper made a "story" of it, recognizing the significance of the circumstance, that at last a man had control of affairs at the front who would not fall back, in the face of defeat. When this report came to the notice of General Grant, he had the adventurous correspondent arrested, pronounced the story a falsehood, branded the author as a "calumniator," and expelled him from the army.

We understood that this was an example of his loyalty to Meade, and of his patriotism as well, for, however much his reputation might be enhanced by the publication of this incident, the morale of the army certainly just then depended upon the implicit faith of the rank and file in their recognized leaders. This trust, so essential to the *esprit de corps* of the troops, impaired as it had been by fractional jealousies and rivalries, General Grant proceeded to foster and strengthen, even at the cost of possible disparagement of himself. We, whose business it was to look closely into matters, soon discovered that while he directed every important movement, Meade was to be recognized as the ostensible commander, and, with his immediate lieutenants was to have full credit for every achievement. Grant even went so far as to assume responsibility where blame might be attached, as in the last misadventure at Cold Harbor.

It was this that had kept that great army of citizen soldiers—baffled, torn, decimated, but ever pressing on its devious way—in such a spirit of transport as it had never before experienced. They had come to believe in them-

selves, in each other, in their immediate commanders, and in the final triumph of the cause for which they fought. Every man was doing his best, and no one was making any mistakes, except, possibly, the unobtrusive, self-effacing man, with whom they had no intimate, personal relations.

It was Mr. Charles C. Coffin, the veteran correspondent of the Boston Journal, a man of deep insight into human character, who led me to realize the true meaning of this exceptional course of conduct. General Grant was patriotic enough to sacrifice his reputation, if need be, for the country; and he knew what was due, in propriety, from an officer to his inferior in rank; but neither of these, nor both together, fully explained his conduct and bearing through these trying times. These could be accounted for only in the view of his absolute unselfishness and true nobility of character. I have never known a more unselfish man. He did not have to study to be kind and courteous to his comrades. It was by no effort of his strong will that he evaded deserved recognition for success and invited censure for disaster. It was instinctive with him. To one who knew him, an ignoble act would have been inconsistent with his character. He could be depended upon in any event and through any provocation to act the part of a manly man.

AN ARMY LED, NOT DRIVEN

I could realize, as many others could not, what General Grant's example and spirit had wrought in that army. Only a few months before I was a soldier in the ranks. And as I lay, broken and bleeding, upon a battlefield, I had seen the flag, for which I had sworn to die—and for which

just then, I wanted to die,—borne off the field, in retreat, in the face of the enemy. And the boys who were bearing it away were as brave as the best, as willing, as anxious to die defending it. There was no panic, no haste. I had a grim satisfaction in that. These comrades of mine were not being driven; they were being led. It was deemed “expedient” that they should “retire.” That was only one incident in the experience of the Army of the Potomac. For hundreds of years we descendants of fighting men had been trained—through our ancestors—to face our foes; to stand and take a knockout blow; to get up and take or give another; to die, if we must, in our tracks. Now, for nearly three years, we had been ordered, repeatedly, to take that awkward, unsoldierly, backward step.

It was a gladsome message, a promise of happy reprisal, that I had taken, at the close of that first day in the Wilderness, to my old comrades of the Second Corps; “To hold their lines all night, and to charge the enemy at daylight.” With that decision of the great commander was the advent of a new spirit, the birth of a great hope and purpose. Since then, through all the vicissitudes of the campaign, I had noticed the steadily rising tide of robust faith and courage through the ranks. And I had come to realize how certainly—almost entirely—this spirit of conquest was due to the steadfast resolution and the generous patriotism of the modest, silent man whom Providence had placed in chief command.

I sat under the spell of Mr. Lincoln’s ardent gaze and rehearsed this story, stimulated by the almost painful interest and quite carried away by my admiration of the man of whom I was speaking. But presently I came to myself

and recalled that I was in the presence of a man of large affairs, whose time I had been consuming with what might seem to him like concerns of small importance. I might find a partial excuse in the fact that he had deliberately chosen the topic for my monologue and had encouraged me by his silence and attention. I uttered some words of apology and started to rise to my feet; but with a gesture of his lifted hand, palm downward, he signaled me to be seated. Then, leaning half way across the table, he said in grateful tones, "My boy, you have told me just what I was hungry to hear." And it is no small joy to me now, years afterward, to know that I was privileged, for a brief half hour that summer night, to bring courage and comfort to that burdened, tired, sorrowful spirit.

Mr. Lincoln reached for a sheet of paper, wrote a half dozen or so lines, folded it in an envelope, addressed it and passed it to me. I read the address: "Lieut. Gen'l. U. S. Grant. By the hand of H. E. (not she) Wing."

I noticed that the envelope was open, and, as I moistened and sealed it, I remarked, "General Headquarters these days are a fleeting show. Many things might happen to me before I reach them." He seized the missive, and laid it upon the table, and, covering it with his broad hand, said: "Henry, you will see that this letter is placed in General Grant's own hand." His look and tones sobered me. "Mr. President," I replied, "I can only promise that it shall fall into no other hands than his."

Several hours afterward, on the banks of the James, seizing upon an occasion when General Grant was alone, I handed him the envelope. He opened it in his deliberate

manner; but as soon as he scanned the lines his face flushed with surprise and pleasure. Then a "far away" look, such as one may see once or twice in a lifetime, came into his serious face and held his gaze for a single instant. But for that instant he was a seer; he was receiving a revelation. From that moment he carried another secret in his bosom. Recovering himself, he turned to me and, taking my hand in both of his, he said simply, "I thank you," with significant emphasis on the last word. I had never seen him so deeply moved.

If that letter is in existence, it must be a rare souvenir of affection and trust between two choice spirits, so dissimilar in tastes and temperament, but so closely united by the bonds of sympathy and sacrifice for a common cause.

